

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
maintained by the
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
and supported by the
CALIFORNIA INTERAGENCY WILDLIFE TASK GROUP
Database Version 8.1 (2005)

B549 Gilded flicker *Colaptes chrysoides*
Family: Picidae Order: Piciformes Class: Aves

Written by: T. Kucera

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Occurs in the Colorado River Valley in southeastern California in desert riparian, desert wash, and Joshua tree habitats. Nearly extirpated (Small 1994). Probably non-migratory, although few data are available (Moore 1995). Recently elevated to specific status from subspecies of northern flicker (*C. atratus*) on the basis of reproductive isolation and differences in genetic and life-history traits (Johnson 1969, Koenig 1984, American Ornithologists Union 1995).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Poorly known but probably generally similar to the northern flicker, with an annual diet about 55% animal matter (mostly insects) consumed primarily in spring and summer, and 45% plant matter, eaten mostly in fall and winter (Bent 1939). Eats many ants (50-75% of animal diet); also beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, moths, caterpillars, various larvae. Tomoff (1974) characterized it as a ground insect eater. Forages in open, on ground, in shrubs, and occasionally on branches and trunks of trees. Uses bill to probe, dig, and glean.

Cover: Trees, shrubs, nest and roost cavities provide cover. Frequents riparian, desert wash, and other habitats with Joshua trees or saguaro cactus.

Reproduction: Nest cavity excavated in soft wood of snag or dead branch of live cottonwood, willow, Joshua tree, or saguaro cactus (Moore 1995).

Water: Like the northern flicker, probably drinks occasionally (Hering 1948).

Pattern: Suitable habitat consists of desert riparian woodlands and giant cactus forests with snags for nest cavities.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Probably not migratory (Moore 1995).

Home Range: Territory and home range apparently same. Size not known for gilded flicker (Moore 1995).

Territory: No data.

Reproduction: Poorly known. Breeds during April and May (Moore 1995). Mean clutch size of 4.2 significantly smaller than that of northern flicker (Koenig 1984). In northern flicker, Incubation 11-16 days, by both sexes. Male provides most of care for

altricial young, which fledge at 25-28 days. Adults apparently pair for life.

Niche: Probably like northern flicker. Mammals prey on eggs and young. Falcons, accipiters, and buteos have been reported as predators of adults. Potentially competes with European starlings, elf owls, and other cavity nesters for nest sites. Like the northern flicker, an important excavator of nest cavities in soft wood (Thomas 1979) and the most terrestrial of woodpeckers in North America (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: Numbers have declined in recent decades as riparian habitat has been lost (Remsen 1978, California Department of Fish and Game 1989). May be nearly extinct in California (Small 1994).

REFERENCES

- American Ornithologists Union. 1995. Fortieth supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. *Auk* 112:819-830.
- Bent, A. C. 1939. Life histories of North American woodpeckers. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 174. 334pp.
- California Department of Fish and Game. 1989. 1988 annual report on the status of California's state listed threatened and endangered plants and animals. Sacramento. 129pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Hering, L. 1948. Nesting birds of the Black Forest, Colorado. *Condor* 50:49-56.
- Johnson, N. K. 1969. Review: Three papers on variation in flickers (*Colaptes*) by Lester L. Short, Jr. *Wilson Bull.* 81:225-230.
- Koenig, W. C. 1984. Clutch size of the gilded flicker. *Condor* 86:89-90.
- Moore, W. S. 1995. Northern flicker. *Birds of North America* 166:1-27.
- Remsen, J. V., Jr. 1978. Bird species of special concern in California. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Admin. Rep. No. 78-1. 54pp.
- Small, A. 1994. California birds: their status and distribution. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.
- Thomas, J. W., ed. 1979. Wildlife habitats in managed forests: The Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington. U.S. Dept. Agric., For. Serv., Portland, OR. Agric. Handb. No. 553. 512pp.
- Tomoff, C. S. 1974. Avian species diversity in desert scrub. *Ecology* 55:396-403.